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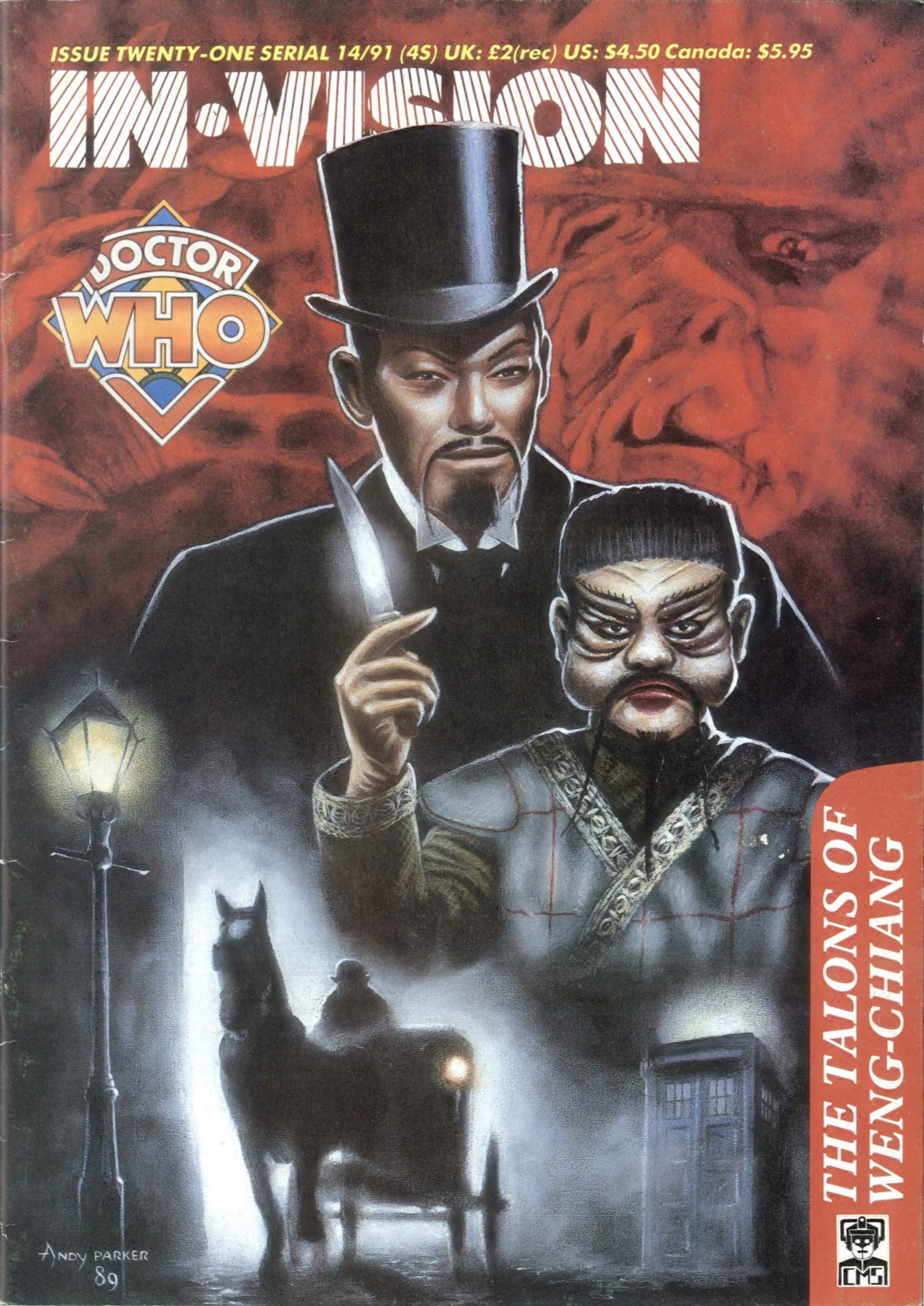
IN-VISION

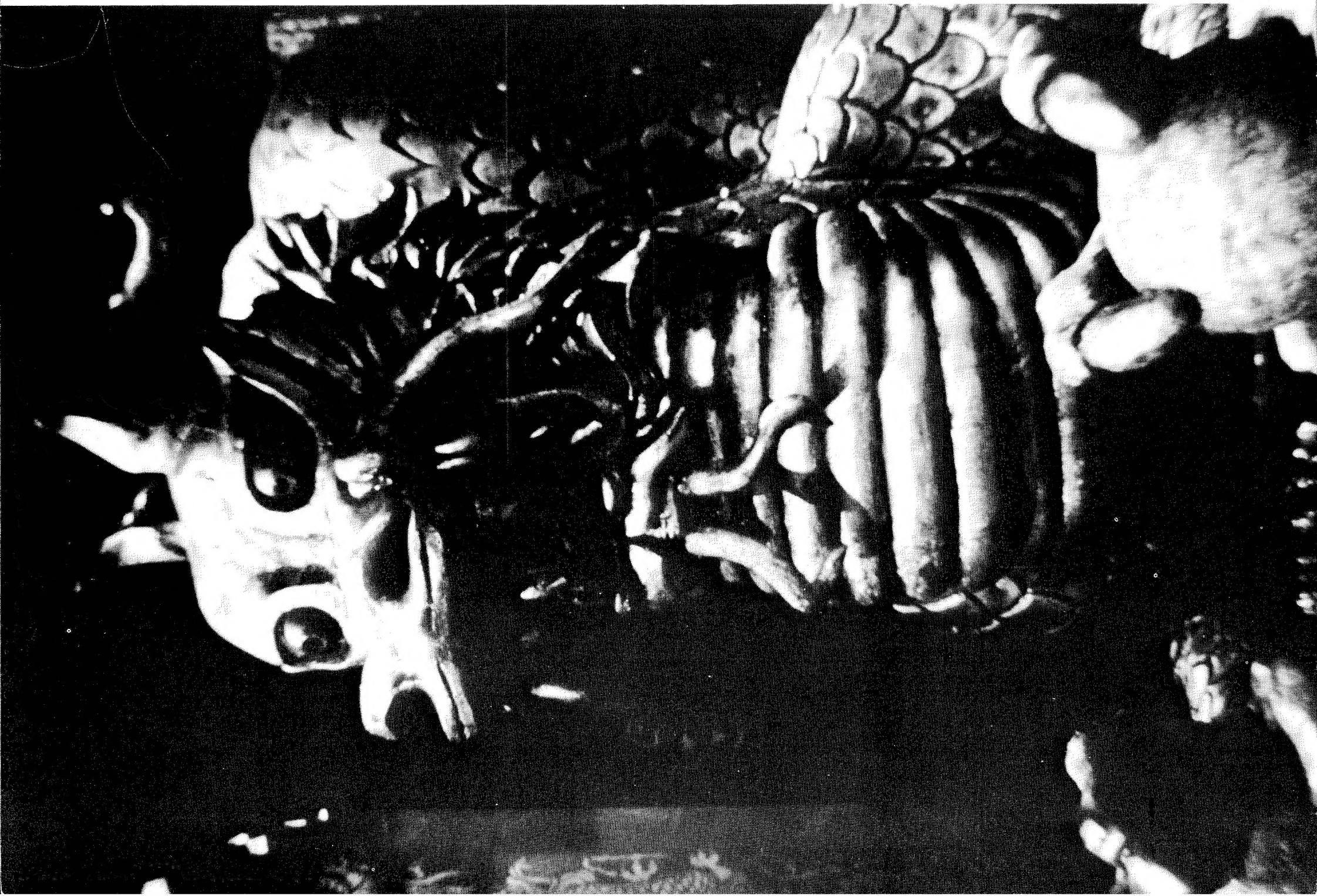
DOCTOR WHO



THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG

ANDY PARKER 89

Front cover: Andy Parker



A dashed queer story

DAVID OWEN wonders whether THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG went over the top

ROLL-UP, roll-up — thrill to the spectacle of a mutilated corpse being dragged from the Thames! Marvel at the Doctor condoning murder! Wonder at the sight of death by drugs overdose! Messrs Hinchcliffe and Holmes bring you the extravaganza to end 'em all — and these are just a *few* of the highlights.

Playing the NVALA's advocate for just a few moments has a surprising effect. It is hard to believe that the six episodes that comprised THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG were actually intended to be family viewing, and this emphasises the fact that by the end of the fourteenth season of **Doctor Who** the audiences had become fairly numbed to series' highest ever level of nastiness. Or realism, depending on one's viewpoint.

TALONS, however, builds on the adult nature of the show that had grown up over the previous years (largely typified by horror and overt violence). It did this largely by introducing elements that lay the story open to accusations of both racism and sexism.

The period London setting is easy both for the BBC to provide successfully, and for the audience to feel at home with. Productions as diverse as **The Duchess of Duke Street** and **The Two Ronnies' Phantom Raspberry Blower of Old London Town** had left the public with a romantic picture of servants, street lamps, horse-drawn cabs and the repeated bafflement of Scotland Yard (see *The Talents of Hinchcliffe-Holmes*, elsewhere this issue for further discussion of this). TALONS successfully manages to show us many tiers of the society of the day, represented by the gentleman, the entrepreneur, the immigrant, the working man, and the working girl (tactfully described by Terrance Dicks in his novelisation as a waitress in a gambling club in Mayfair). If all the incarnations of the Doctor were to have shared a house it would surely not have been in the hushed revery of the Time Lord Academy, nor the clinical bustle of life around UNIT in the nineteen-seventies, but here in the gaslit, fog-shrouded, cobbled metropolis of the 1900s.

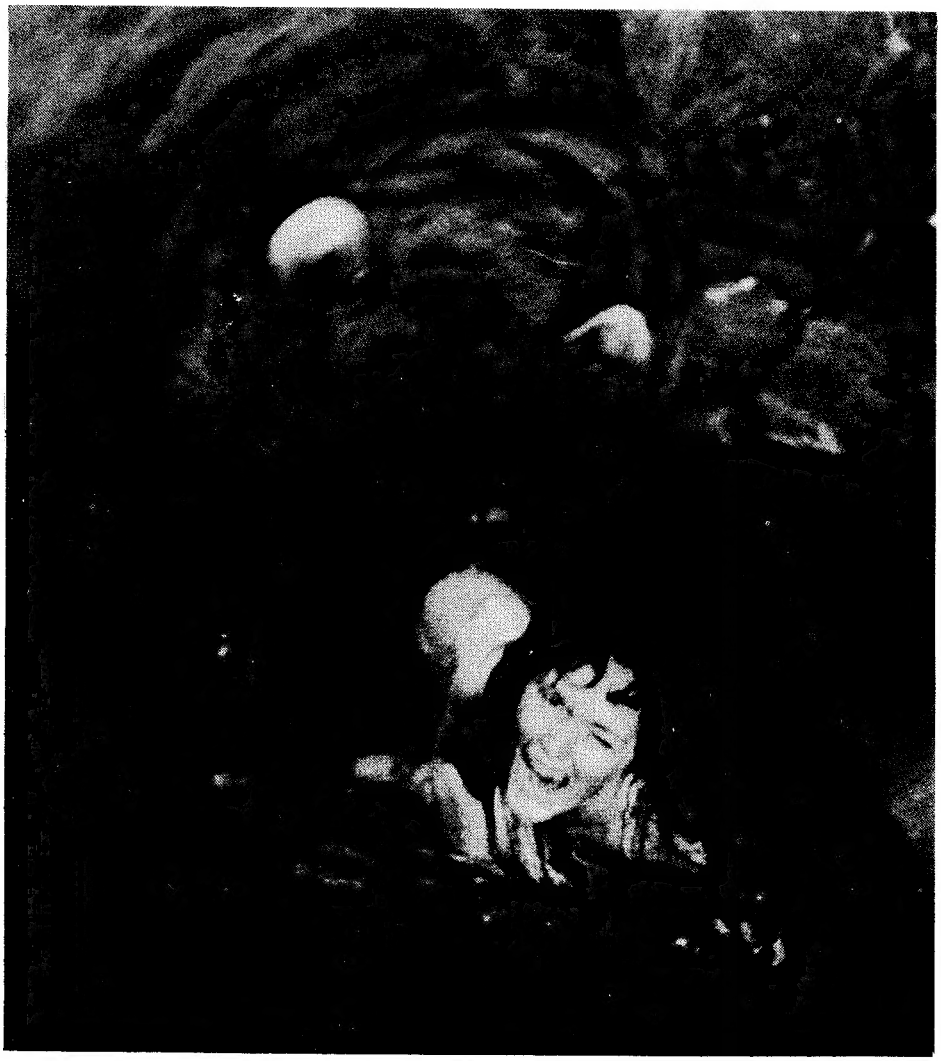
This era has had a strong pull for fantasy writers, notably Michael Moorcock and Christopher Priest. The chance to slowly reveal a science fiction plot from behind the shroud of a Victorian murder mystery is one that can be beautifully exploited. Even the high society language of the time enables the writer to hint at depths of "depravity and deprivation" that cannot be revealed to the nation at tea-time on a Saturday (there may, after all, have been ladies watching).

This production presents us with few respites from darkness by virtue of largely taking place at night, underground, or by gaslight as well as by avoiding garish costume and set design. Indeed, by the time it appears, the House of the Dragon seems far more palatial than the theatre bearing that name. Colour and light are provided, it seems, only by the wonderful cast of characters assembled for the piece by Robert Holmes.

IT has been observed that Holmes managed to write some very memorable pairs of characters for his stories. The increased length of TALONS gave him the opportunity to recombine the characters of the story in different partnerships, thereby showing several aspects of their personae. The first such pairing is that of Litefoot and the Doctor, who by now is such a tyrant, intellectually clubbing-down all who dare to question his wisdom or intuition, that it is just as well that the Professor is such a magnanimous old soul. He questions, but does not dare to disagree. Professor Litefoot represents the best side of the aristocracy — their manners and character rather than the diffidence and aloofness that have frustrated the Doctor in the past (compare Litefoot to Lord Palmerdale in the very next story, HORROR OF FANG ROCK, serial 4V).

The acceptable face of Victorian capitalism is represented by Henry Gordon Jago, a self-made man — largely made, it would seem, by his verbose and alliterative swaggering ▷

A hair-raising experience for Leela



Sean Ditchfield

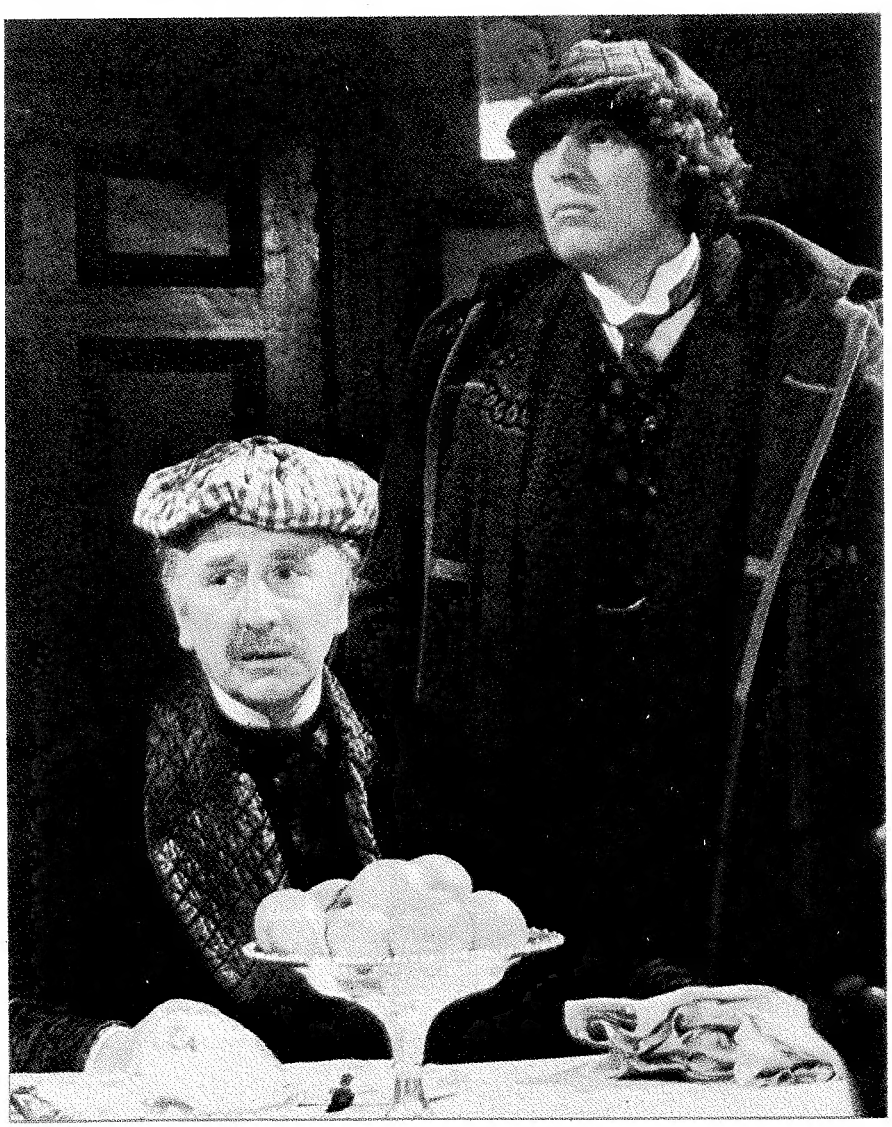
exterior. He is a man who knows to whom he should aquiesce (the Doctor, Change, Litefoot) and who he should dominate (Casey,the loyal Stage Manager and the undeen Wardrobe Mistress, Mrs Samuelson). Watching Jago switch from being Casey's master to the Doctor's servant is an absolute joy. The quashing of Casey's 'imaginary' ghost in the cellar clashes exquisitely with Jago's inventive explanation for every other-worldly act of the Doctor's.

It is not until part five that Jago and Litefoot meet, by which time both Litefoot and the Doctor have had the chance to play Professor Higgins to Leela's Eliza Doolittle. Roles are reversed however when Litefoot finds himself embarrassed into dining a la Sevateem. Leela's prominence in this story is unsurprising given that the image of the Victorian young-womanhood we are given comprises mainly of being reduced to one's underwear and symbolically raped, then murdered, by Greel — a fate which the Savage unfortunately only partly escapes. The non-appearance of Litefoot's ruddy housekeeper and lack of a nagging 'her indoors' for Jago is as lamentable as the treatment of the Chinese for most of this story.

Li H'Sen Chang, perplexingly played by Brit John Bennett, is the only Oriental not to be regarded as mere cannon-fodder (or should that be Janis thorn-fodder, or scorpion venom-fodder, or gas bomb-fodder, or...). It is unfortunate, as with the series previous juxtaposition of an ancient culture with that of period England (in PYRAMIDS OF MARS), that the prejudiced notion that all Englishmen are loveable eccentrics while all foreigners are villains with no sense of humour is once again reinforced. Chang is saved from being merely an inscrutable cipher by the humour he displays when dealing with the Doctor, who he recognises as intellectually superior, both at the police station and on stage at the Palace Theatre.

Chang is a pivotal character in that he, along with the rat (which at least did not wear a denim cap) and Mr. Sin helps to keep Weng-Chiang/Greel hidden from the rest of the characters for the first half of the narrative. Like in previous stories the Doctor has Goth, Morbius has Solon, Davros has Nyder, Greel has Sin and Chang — both as companions to explain his motives to, and also at the climax of the story to rebel and demonstrate that alliances based on evil will ultimately disintegrate. In all these examples, we see that the more apparently sophisticated or intelligent ruler of the partnership turns out to be the more savage and insane in the end. Thankfully, for TALONS, Greels' diobolical laughter is not accompanied by diobolical acting.

Litefoot gets a bag on the head

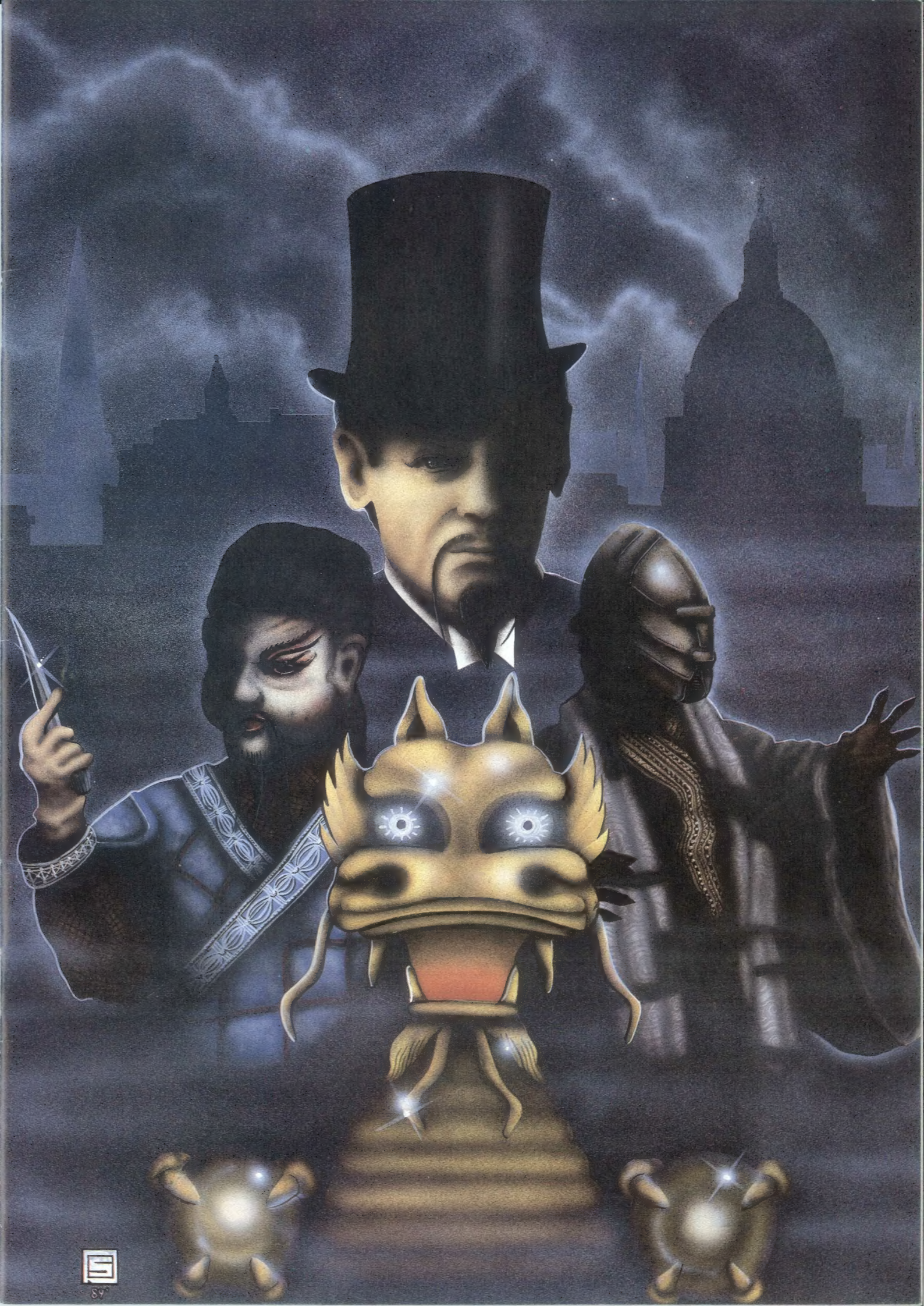


FOR the first time since 1964 the TARDIS is occupied by two aliens. And after only three stories the Doctor and Leela have had a profound effect on each other. Leela is willing to learn anything from anyone, be it the intricacies of Victorian tea parties or the correct pronunciation of 'homonculus'. She even takes a pride in her appearance, delighted when the Doctor and Litefoot admire her new outfit.

The Doctor now seems more prepared to accept the mores of those around him, adopting the role of hunter or warrior whenver it suits his purpose. He barely admonishes Leela's slaughter of a tong assassin upon learning that he was the assassin's intended victim; in the final episode he resorts to a crude gas bomb to escape Greel's henchmen despite having already displayed a gift for equally effective mesmerism. Even more jarring is his reaction to Chang's screams as he is mutilated by the rat — "You'll have to book yourself a new act tomorrow", he tells Jago seemingly oblivious to the waste of life.

Despite being one of the most extreme **Doctor Who** stories ever, THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG works so well that one harbours suspicions that the production team, knowing that this was to be their last story together, attempted to prove beyond doubt that their style of **Doctor Who** would work despite tampering with so many of the series' established precepts.

That they succeeded is beyond doubt — this story won the DWAS season poll and has been extremely successful as a BBC video. One question, though, remains: had Philip Hinchcliffe continued as Producer of **Doctor Who**, would his uncompromising style have gone too far? □



The Talents of Hi

JUSTIN RICHARDS assesses THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG as t

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG is one of the archetypal **Doctor Who** stories. It is a skillful blend of everything that the team of Producer Philip Hinchcliffe and Script Editor Robert Holmes sought to achieve. It touches on themes explored in earlier stories, expands on previous elements, and adds new ones of its own to the mix. It is both a summary and the apotheosis of the most popular era of **Doctor Who**.

At its simplest, THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG is a vehicle for standard elements. It is a framework which holds together an amalgam of things we have seen before. There is the masked villain, reminiscent of Sutekh or Goth. One could be forgiven for thinking that Greel is in fact the Master, recovering from his semi-regeneration of THE DEADLY ASSASSIN. The clues are there — the disguised features, his powers of hypnotism and use of others to do his dirty work, and the love of an act — in this case literally a stage performance. Greel is in the new tradition of the super criminal, rather than the threat being from an alien race. In every sense he is a *human* villain.

True, this is not restricted to the Hinchcliffe era. The Master is an older foe, and there have been single super-villains before. But with few exceptions they have had hoardes of monsters to help them (like Omega), or have been confined to purely historical stories.

But the argument for a single foe with few henchmen still stands — the cost. An old idea is exploited in this period, but it will not die with it. The Rutan of HORROR OF FANG ROCK (serial 4V) is a single isolated alien. The Virus Nucleus has human followers. The time of the super-baddie is just beginning, we will yet have Cessair of Diplos, the Shadow, the Pirate Captain, Scaroth, Sharez Jek... and of course the Master will prove that you can't put a good villain down. But the temptation is always to surround the central enemy with monsters for compatriots.

The progression for Holmes and Hinchcliffe seemed to be towards the single strong enemy from monsters led by an articulate spokesthing. So, in season twelve, Noah speaks for the Wirrn, the Cyberleader puts cyberactions into cyber-words, and Davros creates, leads, and falls foul of the Daleks. But already the budget is biting back — there is only one Sontaran (camera-trickery excepted) with just a cheap robot for company.

By the following season, the minions are less important and the leader has assumed greater status. Broton leads his few Zygons left over from the previous season, but there is only one Anti-man, and Sutekh's service robots are limited in speech, actions, and cost. Morbius is alone with Solon and there is only single Krynoid monster in any one episode. Even Styggron, scientific leader of a whole race, has only a soldier and a walk-on for company.

By this season the trend is reaching its logical conclusion. The only story to feature more than one alien monster of the same kind (Horda excepted) is THE ROBOTS OF DEATH (serial 4R, see last issue).

But TALONS takes the super-villain further. Here we have not a single apparently all-powerful adversary, but three. First Li H'Sen Chang is the enemy, blessed with special hypnotic powers and leader of the Tong of the Black Scorpion. Then the emphasis shifts. Chang is just a man, and Greel is the real enemy — "a foe from the future" although we know only that he has access to technology and mental powers. But already Greel is being set-up as a bungler, "not only a technological ignoramous, he's an absent-minded one as well", and Mr. Sin becomes the focus of attention. Sin is a different type of foe again. He is an organic robot who "revels in carnage", and once off the leash is willing and enthusiastic to kill his former master and his followers. Unlike stories where the true villain is revealed late, here there are different enemies, each with very different powers and motives.

How much of the motivation of this shift from many to few was financial, and how much dramatic is arguable. Certainly fewer enemies allows charcter development; allows us to understand the motives of the villain. Greel's motive is obvious, while Chang seeks to please his god. It is the time available to explore Chang's character that makes his motive plausible, just as it is the full fictional background given to the Peking Homonculus that makes Sin's motives clear.

But the trend has since changed, and gone through similar stages in reverse. The Terileptil Leader is the only articulate member of his race that we see. But already hoardes of Cybermen are massing and stories of mass alien invasion are not far behind, be they Eocenes, Daleks, Vervoids or Haemavores.

Just as the villains of the Hinchliffe years are more complex, so are their motives. The most common motive for a Hinchliffe enemy is possession. The perceived villain is a vehicle, a carrier, for the real danger. Noah is host to the Wirrn just as Sorenson is infected with anti-matter. Goth and Chang are probably partially hypnotised, and Hieronymous, Chase and Marcus Scarman are completely taken-over by the alien menace.

A human being possessed makes for good drama. The first two Quatermass stories rely on the possession and perversion of ordinary people by alien influence. Having a human danger is cheap, but it also allows an actors to make full use of their talents of expression and their voice — at least until the physical possession renders the victim unidentifiable.

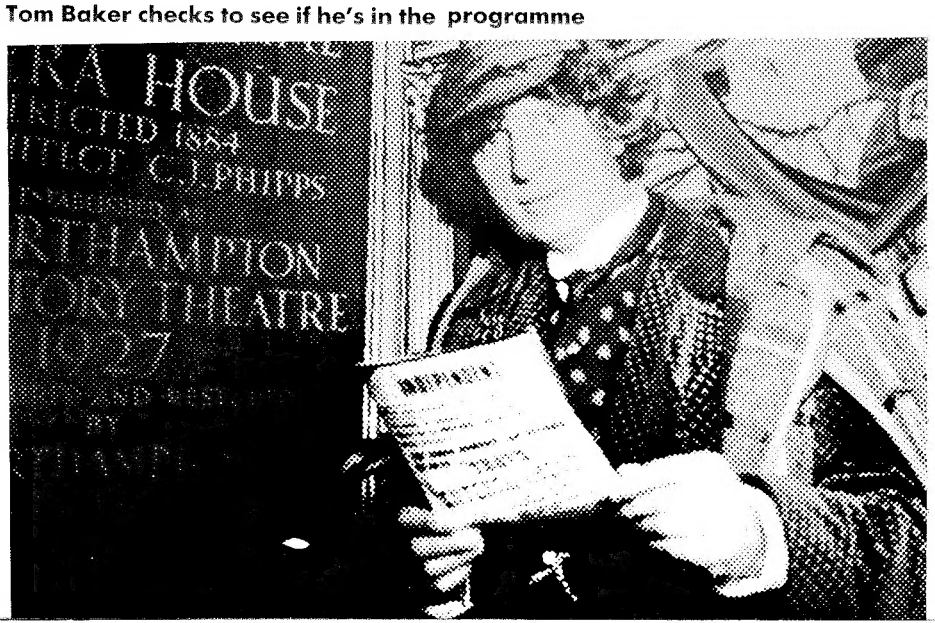
There is also a great deal of mileage in the 'grace-of-God' factor. It is easy to associate with a character who starts off like everyone else, and through no fault of their own or through a fault which they could not perceive as such, like Sorenson's desire to save his planet from dying with its sun, falls fould of fate. We are all aware of how perfect our own hindsight can be.

The dramatic impact is great. The ancient Greeks exploited it dramatically, and as a device nobody has found better. Like Oedipus, a character trait leads to inevitable destruction. The drama lies partly in association with the victim, and also in the dramatic irony of the audience's perception of the danger ahead of the victim's. It is obvious to us that if you've been warned that you will kill your father and marry your mother, you do not pick a fight with the first old man who comes along and then find you have to marry his widow to get his throne. But to ancient Greeks who have had their heels stapled together and been abandonned on a mountain this is a minor consideration. For the moment.

Noah has a similar problem. His fatal character trait (his *hamartia*) is his distrust of intruders. This seems reasonable enough, but it means his disbelieves the Doctor's warnings and ventures into the Solar Stacks where the embryo Wirrn is forming. We suspect from the moment he is infected, and know from his strange behaviour and inability to distinguish between himself and Dune, that he is doomed — this is the moment of peripeteia, when the tragedy becomes evident. But Noah's moment of realisation is not until he has killed Libri. The characters discover the danger later than the audience (the ancient Greek term is *anagnorisis* — the moment when the character thinks "Oh my goodness — I've been peripeteiaed"). In THE ARK IN SPACE this moment is given a further sting for the audience as Noah's physical possession is revealed at the same moment.

Similarly, in TALONS, the shift of emphasis from one villain to another is signposted for the viewers. Greel is already well known to us when Chang's act goes wrong — as we know it will having seen Greel menace Lee in the cellar. The Doctor has already explained the Peking Homonculus to us, and in case we thought that was just petty background information, we see Greel begin to pander to Sin in the final episode. And as his porcine grunting gets more pronounced, we suspect that Sin is ignoring Greel's advice and staying at the laser controls of the dragon idol for a reason.

Tom Baker checks to see if he's in the programme



nchcliffe-Holmes

e culmination of the Hinchcliffe years, and a pointer to the future.

While motive and performance both lend considerable credibility, neither counts for anything without narrative and setting. Individual production flaws can be glossed over and disguised, but a complete environment cannot be hidden any more than can a ridiculously implausible storyline.

When **Doctor Who** transports us to an alien world, we are asked to believe that what we see really is alien — and there are two ways of doing this. One is to present a setting that is totally unlike what we have experienced before. PLANET OF EVIL (serial 4H, see **IN•VISION** issue eight) attempts this with the jungle world of Zeta Minor. The other approach is to create what the audience's experiences lead them to *believe* an alien world would look like. This is probably far from the truth, and based partly on our limited experiences of the surface of the Moon and nearby planets (particularly Mars) but mainly on our experience of the depiction of other fictional worlds in previous **Doctor Who** stories and other visual science and fantasy fiction. It may be a cliche that the typical **Doctor Who** world is rather like a quarry in the Home Counties, but to a large degree that is what the audience (by 1976-7) expected a **Doctor Who** alien world to look like. If it then turns out (as was intended in THE HAND OF FEAR — serial 4N, see **IN•VISION** issue sixteen) to be a real quarry, the audience is surprised.

Setting stories on Earth gets around the problems of credibility and cost. But a story set in the past has another problem. There are two pasts. There is the past as it was, and we all have expectations of that, and there is the past as it *really* was. Should the production aim for historical accuracy, or for what the audience expects?

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG goes unashamedly for what the audience expects. Partly this is because the images are less harrowing, and mainly because the fictional, popular Victorian setting makes a better backdrop for the story. It is in many ways more interesting an environment than the historically accurate one. As Robert Holmes said: "That kind of sub-Victorian era fascinated me. I was a great devotee of this myth of flickering candle and gaslight, horse-drawn carriages and the whole British Empire concept of behaviour. Of course, I knew it was all romantic nonsense really. Those characters are seen in the rosy light of hindsight when in actual fact they led repressed, ignorant and deprived lives. It's just the traditional image of a popular, enjoyable and enduring part of fiction — it's great fun to write those kinds of colourful characters and draw on influences like Sherlock Holmes, Jack the Ripper, the Phantom of the Opera and the Terror of the Tongs." (*Doctor Who Magazine Winter Special*, 1986.)

And just as Holmes found the more "colourful" characters of the age more interesting to write for, so the audience finds them more interesting to watch. The same will surely be true of the present day — will the historical plays of the future feature unemployed moping round Liverpool, or yuppies playing the Stock Exchange? The popular myth of the latter part of the twentieth century is more like to be **Howard's Way** than **Boys from the Blackstuff**.

Just as television will be a major influence on how our own age is viewed, so literature is an influence that colours our views of the past. Robert Holmes admits that his story is an admixture of Sherlock Holmes, Fu-Manchu, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and others; Philip Hinchcliffe describes it (in *Doctor Who — The Unfolding Text*, p128) as "a Jack the Ripper story". The gruesome realities of Jack the Ripper and his (largely middle-aged) victims is one that literature and the media has altered and romanticised. There is something in Greel's claim that History is a liar ("It is the winning side that writes history").

But there is no doubt that TALONS (like PYRAMIDS OF MARS) gains from its romanticised setting. The character of Jago, for example, is historically flawed to such a degree that the characterisation is totally invalid. Holmes' character is a well-meaning, blustering coward who hides behind his flowery and alliterative language — the language he relies on as the single permanent act at the Palace Theatre.

In reality, the theatre owners and managers were thick-skinned business men, and the acts were announced with as much enthusiasm and panache as the 11.50 from Dorking, and a caption card was set up at the side of the stage on an easel. The figure of the alliteratively literate compere provoking punning groans and appreciative applause from the audience is a myth founded on Leonard Sachs' hosting of **The Good Old Days**. Once again history is less interesting than popular myth.

The secret of presenting this myth as fact lies in how much the audience believes in the world and figures presented. This in turn depends partly on the beliefs and plausibility of the production and writing team, and partly in how much we believe in the myth already.

Here not only the backdrop, but the events set against it are ridiculous to those who take time to examine them. But they are convincing to most of us because the standard of the production, and the credibility of the performances convince us. The script is written totally seriously — it asks us with a straight face to believe in people and events that everything on the screen tells us is true. There is no humour in the explanation (or the consequences) of the detailed description of a homicidal ventriloquist's-dummy that is in fact an amalgam of circuitry and a dead pig. What could be almost normal (Jago suggests a midget dressed as a doll) is somehow more convincing given an absurd explanation — just as Egyptian mummies are really robots, the Loch Ness Monster is not *just* a dinosaur but a cybernetic alien, a supercomputer gone mad becomes the perfect gentlemachine offering cigars and period soft-furnishings... The ridiculous can become real, absurdism comes to Hinchcliffe's **Doctor Who** and by the time Graham Williams has exploited it further, you will believe an electric parrot can fly.

The explanations of super-criminal from the future, porcine robots and laser-eyed dragons come easier by being introduced well after we have got involved in the story and its setting. Apart from the rat and the walking midget, which are weird, but could have a 'Vistorian' explanation, the first out-of-period element is Chang's episode two hypnotism of Jago. Hypnosis is not so unexpected given the setting and the other events, but the video effect of the flashing eyes suggests an alien influence. Soon after this Greel refers to the possibility of the Doctor being a "time agent", and the science fiction is afoot. Just as in PYRAMIDS OF MARS, or THE HAND OF FEAR, science fiction slips into the 'normal' scheme of things.

As the story begins to encompass unexpected events and beings, so we begin to discover that the canvass it is played on is wider than we thought. Just as in THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS, the story we see is a relatively minor coda to events that have already happened. Solon's attempt to recreate Morbius is by no means as spectacular as the events we learn of that led to his execution. TALONS is small-fry compared to the fifty-first century Icelandic Alliance and the Philippino army's advance on Reykjavik.

This intimation that the Doctor is aware of the broader picture is not limited to this era of the programme, but is generally exploited more here than before. The Doctor is aware of more of his enemies and of the history of the events he is involved in. He knows of Morbius, of the Osirans, and enough to understand the Book of the Old Time of Gallifrey. He has enough knowledge of the Sontarans to defeat Styre, is aware of the Cybermen's dislike of gold and the history of the CyberWar. He understands the dangers of Zeta Minor, is au fait with the Krynoid, and understands the complexities of a Sandminer and robotic societies and the phobias associated with them.

The problem is keeping the Doctor vulnerable. Partly this is achieved by making the villains even more terrible, and partly by leaving judicial gaps in the Doctor's knowledge or having him realise the true situation too late, thus keeping the Doctor omniscient but rendering his knowledge less of an unfair advantage. The Doctor does not realise that Sin is the Peking Homonculus until after the Time Cabinet has been stolen; he does not discover Greel's true identity until the final episode. But once he knows, he is able to outline the history of the Homonculus and to identify Greel as "the ▷

> "It was made in Peking for the Commissioner of the Icelandic Alliance. It was in the Ice Age, about the year five thousand... The Peking Homonculus was a toy, a plaything for the Commissioner's children. It contained a series of magnetic fields operating on a printed circuit and a small computer.
>
> It had one organic component — the cerebral cortex of a pig. Anyway, something went wrong. It almost caused World War Six... Somehow the pig part took over.
>
> So Weng-Chiang has brought the Peking Homonculus back through time. He could have done, it disappeared completely, it was never found.
>
> This pig thing is still alive. It needs an operator of course, but the mental feedback is so intense that the swinish influence has become more dominant. It hates humanity and it revels in carnage." □

infamous Minister of Justice; the Butcher of Brisbane". (It is interesting to see the same trick tried with Sylvester McCoy's Doctor, especially since it falls foul of the problems of omniscience for the most part. BATTLEFIELD is too much tied up with its own fictional past too soon, whereas THE CURSE OF FENRIC paints a believable backdrop that enhances rather than distrcts from the actual story.)

The references to other events and times kept peripheral. They are enough to convince us of the validity of the current events, just as references to things we do know about can serve as shorthand obviating the need to restate them. The references to other literature, and the influences that we can detect from sources as diverse as *Fu-Manchu* and *Dead of Night* act as nostalgia for the source material, and as references for the literate audience to pick up. Not knowing about Sherlock Holmes will not impair your enjoyment of the story, but awareness will enable you to appreciate the Doctor's choice of clothing and phraseology ("Elementary My dear Litefoot") as well as the in-jokes — like Litefoot's housekeeper being a Mrs Hudson.

For the production team the influences areful too. They serve as reference material for all elements of the production from design, such as the obligatory fog and hansom cabs, to performance (see *Production* for notes on Douglas Wilmer as role model for Tom Baker).

From the Script Editor's point of view they also give a starting point, and they offer a safety net — what has proved to be popular elsewhere should continue to be popular given some integrity and imagination.

The importance to Robert Holmes of references to previous material, primarily old films, is well known and documented. Suffice it to say that his own scripts are especially rich in them and he seems to have enjoyed taking a set of stock situations and images and working them into a new and credible narrative. The influences on TALONS (intentional or not) seem to range from *Sherlock Holmes* to *The Phantom of the Opera*, taking in *Sexton Blake* (with Leela as Tinker?), **Adam Adamant Lives**, **The New Avengers**, *Dracula*, Jack the Ripper, and of course *Fu-Manchu*. The references are not disguised, and half the fun is in spotting them: Casey refers to "Jolly Jack at work again", while the Doctor descibes Greel variously as a "slavering gangrenous vampire" and the "reclusive phantom".

THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG is typical, and vintage, Robert Holmes and classic **Doctor Who**. But there is more to it than simply the fact that is does more of what Hinchcliffe and Holmes had been trying to do all along. The show is certainly adult, with barely-veiled prostitutes and barely-clad companion, violence on a grand scale, and all the literary and media references. But it is also a good, straightforward story.

Holmes had the knack of picking the right references — Sherlock Holmes has undergone a revival just as *The Phantom of the Opera* is now big business after the Lloyd-Webber musical, and THE ARK IN SPACE predates the trend for body-horror picked up on by the similar plot in *Alien* by several years (see *Grubs Up* by Tim Robins in **IN•VISION** issue two).

TALONS had the twin advantages of time to develop the themes, over six episodes rather than four, and being the last story that Holmes was responsible for tobe produced by Philip Hinchcliffe. Holmes and Hinchcliffe had got the formula right almost immediately with THE ARK IN SPACE, nearly three years later they had improved upon that success in almost all areas of production and scripting.

There is also another factor which makes this story more archetypal and memoral **Who** than many others — its setting. The Victorian age has always been ideal for the Doctor. The first four Doctors are as at home then (both in character and costume) as any other place or time — probably more so. Similarly, being the brink of the emergence of technology, science fiction also works well in this era, whether written then (Wells and Verne), or set in the period, when it usually making use of the audience's greater scientific sophistication than that of the characters.

The Victorians, in the fiction, tend to equate science with magic — just as we try to explain the magic of contemporary sf with pseudo-science. The tarppings of classic fictional science are Victorian — who wants to see a bland set of solid state circuits when you can have the elegant and impressive glassware of a nineteenth century laboratory. It is the Gothic scientific constructions of Frankenstein and Captain Nemo that represent the true fontier-breaking science, not the clinical white walls and sterile corridors of Space Station Nerva. The Victorian trappings represent a science that we can associate with — we know the machinery — and at once feel superior to and in awe of. There is so much going on, and the while the results and purpose may be advanced and fantastic, the setting and props are commonplace and tangible. One of the most impressive sequences in the existing episode of THE EVIL OF THE DALEKS (serial LL) is the establishing shot of Maxtible's laboratory. The camera pans up past the bubbling flasks and steaming glass tubes to show the Doctor entering behind. It is the glassware that is in focus, and the Doctor is at once in keeping with the setting and apparently delighted to be there. It is surely no coincidence that the Daleks too seem just as much at home in the total incongruity of the cluttered Victorian setting than in their palatial and spacious city.

Doctor Who works best amongst the visible science of the Victorian age. The TARDIS itself has levers and switches and dials rather than LEDs and buttons and touch-sensitive controls. For this season it is taken a stage further and the "old" control room is seen to be wooden-panelled and equipped with escritoire rather than Time Rotor. The machinery that powers Greel's fifty-first century Time Cabinet, for the brief glimpse we get inside, is hardly anachronistic in the nineteenth century — flashing diodes and chunky circuitry live within the fused molecules that so resemble lacquered bronze.

Perhaps both Greel and the Doctor, like the Peking Homonculus, are more at home in this era than their own. They have other similarities too — both are able to hypnotise Jago, and both enable or take part in stage acts. It is not by chance that the Doctor turns out to be an expert conjuror. And in THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG and the other stories of the Hinchliffe-Holmes era it epitomises and closes, we have proof positive that given the appropriate trappings and support **Doctor Who** can work its own special magic through the science of television. □

Audience

Viewing figures for THE ROBOTS OF DEATH (serial 4R — see last issue) averaged approximately 12.7 million. For THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG they dropped to about 10.3. The earlier episodes fared better, with JICTAR totals well above 11 million. But by the time the last episode was transmitted on April 2nd 1977 **Doctor Who** was only pulling an audience of 9.3 million. It's position in the national ratings had slumped from 16th (for part one of TALONS) to 32nd (for part 6).

But the reason for this decline was not the power of opposition broadcasting. As the Granada comparison chart shows, ITV was fielding exactly the same line-up as it had for the opening episode of THE ROBOTS OF DEATH; a nondescript procession of Sixties sci-fi repeat, a talent show and a quiz game.

Nevertheless, the chart does offer a few clues to the reasons for the apparent fall-off in **Who**'s popularity. The first is the presence of two 'specials', either of which would push even top-rated regular programmes a few places down the chart. FA Cup sixth-round football took **Match of the Day** above **Doctor Who** that week, while ITV's networked premier of the James Bond film *Thunderball* guaranteed the channel the number one slot for those seven days.

The second clue is the date. By the end of February the colder, darker Winter evenings were almost over. On March 20th British Summer Time began, hastening the seasonal drop in television viewers that happens parennially as daylight lengthens. The fourteenth season of **Doctor Who** finished four weeks later that the previous one (because of the extended mid-season break) and it was inevitable that the six-parter viewing figures would be hit by this traditional Spring decline.

The last factor in the equation is timing. The perceived 'adult' nature of WENG-CHIANG helped push its weekly timeslot back a further quarter hour to 6:30 — a difference sufficiently big to lose it a small portion of the younger audience.

In contrast, however, the second episode achieved 11.3 million viewers despite being broadcast at 6:35pm — a one-time occurrence perhaps due to the first screening of the 90-minute pilot episode for *Fantastic Journey*. This was a short-lived American sf series, and the last of its breed before the opening in the US in the Summer of 1977 of *Star Wars*. □

ITV (GRANADA region) **SATURDAY 26th FEBRUARY 1977**

N E W S	THE INVADERS (U.S) rpt		NEW FACES variety	CELEBRITY SQUARES quiz	THE JAMES BOND FILM Thunderball (first TV showing)					N E W S	ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE part 3/17 pop doc.	
5:00	5:30	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00

BBC 1

TAR-ZAN CART-OON	N E W S	JIM'LL FIX IT var'ty	DR. WHO Tal. ep/1	FILM Masquerade			RONNIE CORBETTs SAT.SPEC variety	SERPICO (U.S) series	N E W S	FA CUP MATCH OF THE DAY 6th round		
5:00	5:30	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00

BBC 2

HORIZON Hunters of the Seal	OPEN DOOR	SIGHT AND SOUND Kiki Dee		N E W S	MASH (US)	MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE? Dancing Doc.		FILM INTERNATIONAL Kaseki				

PRODUCTION

INTERVIEWED for the Canadian fanzine *Time Meddler* in 1981, Robert Holmes was asked for his motivation in writing THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG:

"Motivation? Desperation! I had asked Robert Banks Stewart to write the last story of that season, and suggested he work on the idea of somebody from Earth's future returning either to the present day or to the recent past. I had finished THE DEADLY ASSASSIN [serial 4P, see **IN•VISION** issue eighteen] and, thinking the season was sewn up, took off for only the second holiday I had had since joining the programme.

"My wife was then taken ill in Germany and had to go into hospital. So I got back to the office three weeks later than expected, only to find a note from Bob Stewart saying that other sudden commitments prevented him from writing the script. Far too late to find and brief another writer, so it became a case on 'Once more unto the breach...'"

Origins

The "irredeemable scoundrel", as Holmes would later describe Stewart, had been head-hunted by Thames Television to handle some of the script editing on their highly successful series **The Sweeney**, which was a format closer to his heart than **Doctor Who**. His two previous storylines were significantly changed by Robert Holmes — see **IN•VISION** issues seven (TERROR OF THE ZYGONS, serial 4F) and thirteen (THE SEEDS OF DOOM, serial 4L).

But before his rapid move to Thames's Euston Road buildings, Robert Banks Stewart did collaborate in some detail with producer Philip Hinchcliffe and script editor Robert Holmes on the essential structure of the six-part story — and is credited in the BBC records for the storyline he submitted before leaving for Thames (see *Context*, later this issue).

Philip Hinchcliffe had originally suggested a Sax Rohmer-style *Fu-Manchu*-type detective story. Robert Banks Stewart had a fascination with the 'Gumshoe/detective' format, and his series **Shoestring** was launched on BBC only a year later. So it was thought he would find adding a sleuthing aspect to the Doctor's personality straightforward.

The character of Nayland Smith from the *Fu-Manchu* books was almost Sherlock Holmes updated for the twentieth century. Douglas Wilmer's portrayal of Smith in the *Hammer* films was seen as a role-model for Stewart to study, especially since Wilmer had also played the part of Sherlock Holmes on television.

In 1982 Tom Baker was cast as Sherlock Holmes for the BBC's third television adaption of the Conan Doyle book *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The production was heavily **Who**-influenced: produced by Barry Letts, with Terrance Dicks as script editor. Just before location shooting on Dartmoor began, Tom Baker said: "It *is* rather brave casting considering it is only eight months since I left **Doctor Who**. But Doctor Who and Sherlock Holmes are both parts that I always wanted to play. And it is a challenge to swap the Doctor's K•9 mechanical dog for a hell-hound!"

Robert Holmes: "I'm not a fan of Sherlock Holmes, although I've read all the books. But I am a fan of that *fictitious* Victorian period, with fog, gas lamps, hansom cabs and music halls. We look back on it and say that's what it was like. But of course it wasn't. People were slaving in dark, satanic mills and starving in London gutters. But the popular concept of Victoriana is this, with colourful language." (See also *Ideal Holmes*, elsewhere this issue, for a discussion of the *Sherlock Holmes* and *Fu-Manchu* references.)

The influence of *The Phantom of the Opera* owed more to Robert Holmes's input. Holmes liked the idea of his murderous, futuristic super-criminal skulking in a darkened underworld and controlling his minions of the Tong from there.

But it is not clear how much of the story and characters came originally from which writer. Certainly the direction of the story altered towards the end, as Holmes recalled: "I wrote the first four episodes and gave them to director David Maloney, who was quite happy. I then spent about ten days at home thinking 'What am I going to do with the last two parts?' In the end I veered completely away from the original music hall set-up."

It seems that Robert Holmes used his second excuse to write for the programme's fourteenth season as an opportunity to restructure the story completely. He left in only the Rohmer/Leroux motifs and the original concept of a super-criminal marooned in Earth's past. The evidence for this is quite strong: he put his own name on the script, which he only did if he considered the story to be entirely his own. Hence THE ARK IN SPACE (serial 4C) and TALONS are credited to Holmes, even though another writer received copyright fees for the storyline (John Lucarotti for ARK, see **IN•VISION** issue two). On the other hand, stories that Holmes largely rewrote he credited to pseudonyms — PYRAMIDS OF MARS (serial 4G) was credited to Stephen Harris (the original script was by Lewis Griefer, see **IN•VISION** issue nine), and THE BRAIN OF MORBIUS (serial 4K) went out under the name of Robin Bland (original script by Terrance Dicks, see **IN•VISION** issue twelve).

Further evidence is that in the late seventies, and in the wake of ITV's *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, Robert Holmes proposed a spin-off series featuring the characters of Litefoot and Jago. It is something that Holmes would not have contemplated unless he considered those characters to be entirely his own creations.

Leela's development

One idea which Hinchcliffe urged Holmes to pursue in this story was the character development of Leela. Originally Leela had come about because, as Holmes said: "Philip and I were probably thinking about Raquel Welch. Who doesn't?" But having proved herself proficient with a hunting knife and possessed of useful primitive instincts to complement the Doctor's more cerebral approach, there was the question of where to take the character next.

When originally looking for a replacement for Sarah Jane Smith, Hinchcliffe proposed modelling the new companion on Eliza Doolittle, the Cockney flower girl from Shaw's *Pygmalion* whom Professor ▷

Leela is all dolled-up

Higgins refines into a model of Victorian elegance. Hinchcliffe: "We wondered what to do with a new assistant. Bob wanted to do a Victorian story, but couldn't because he was too busy. Still, we decided to do the Eliza Doolittle idea, but about an alien barbarian girl who had to be civilised instead of the Cockney. It was the same principle: the Doctor being Higgins to the girl who didn't know how to eat or behave, and who, if someone was rude to her, would sling a knife into his shoulder blades.

"It was an interesting concept, and we were able to use it twice. Because Bob couldn't do it, we inserted it into Chris Boucher's story [THE ROBOTS OF DEATH, serial 4R — see **IN•VISION** issue twenty]. Later on, Bob was free to write a story, and did the *Pygmalion* thing as a party piece for the last one of that rather good season along with Jack the Ripper, Fu Manchu and so on."

The completed version of TALONS shows Leela's education in Victorian eating habits (although Litefoot learns more than he teaches her) and her emerging interest in the theatre and in fine clothes.

Robert Holmes: "I took particular pleasure in using the character of Leela to go against the conventions of the time. There are lovely scenes like the one where she demands that the police put a prisoner to the torture, and where she eats a joint of meat with her hands — thus forcing the ever-polite Litefoot to do the same."

New production team

By this time Philip Hinchcliffe knew he was leaving **Doctor Who** and saw the progression of Leela as a legacy for his successor. Hinchcliffe, along with trailing producer Graham Williams persuaded a reluctant Robert Holmes to stay on as Script Editor. They argued that the series needed an experienced member of the team to continue until the new producer had settled in.

Graham Williams' previous experience had been with the hospital series **Angels** — operationally a far simpler series that **Doctor Who**. Not only that, but the series was also due to lose another regular member of staff — production unit manager Christopher D'Oyly John — at the end of the season.

Scripting

Robert Holmes was faced with a tight deadline for delivering his scripts. He had arrived back from his extended leave almost at the date the director joined. And director David Maloney needed to work out his production schedules and plan his film diary.

To make life easier for the hard-pressed Holmes, Hinchcliffe and Maloney agreed that the story should be written structurally as a four-parter with two episodes tacked on the end. The first four episodes would contain almost all the film and location work — there is in fact 16' of film in part five, and none in part six. This meant that Maloney could organise the location work (as usual to be completed before studio recording) while Holmes was still writing the final two parts of the script.

The constraints on the final two episodes were therefore that it should not introduce any new location requirements, or any principle characters who would need casting and costuming from a budget already allocated.

Director

A distinct advantage, as far as Holmes was concerned, was that the Director of THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG was David Maloney. He was one of the BBC's most experienced series directors, in particular having directed seven previous **Who**s. He was soon to begin work as producer of the new BBC series **Blake's Seven**. And his choice was to prove crucial in the studio (see below).

Maloney's appointment as director of the season's final story was deliberate. Wanting to "go out with a bang", Hinchcliffe applied for as many top names as he could get. As a result the technical crew included Fred Hamilton as film cameraman for the show's most ambitious location shoot yet; visual effects designer Michaeljohn Harris, soon to be promoted to head of the department after Bernard Wilkie's retirement; set designer Roger Murray-Leach, whom Hinchcliffe regarded as something of his protege, having brought him into drama from light entertainment.

Costume design

Costume designer John Bloomfield was responsible for creating the costumes for the seven principle characters — the Doctor, Leela, Li H'Sen Chang, Mr. Sin, Jago, Litefoot, and Magnus Greel. Had he not resigned from the BBC for health reasons (see **IN•VISION** issue 18), James Acheson would have been Hinchcliffe's first choice. But getting Bloomfield, the award-winning designer of costumes for **The Six Wives of Henry VIII**, was by no means second best. The press handouts for TALONS stress the high production standards the costumes would emphasise.

In creating Tom Baker's costume for the role of the Doctor, Bloomfield picked up on the Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper motifs. The costume was cut from pure wool and the stitching and embroidery followed the script's stipulation that the Doctor be dressed in a "viciously checked Ulster". A matching deerstalker was also provided. Years later the costume was sold at a convention in the USA for the relatively low sum of $500 (approximately £300).

Louise Jameson had three costumes as Leela. As well as the knickerbocker suit she wears at the start of the story, there is the evening dress which Litefoot buys for her to wear to the theatre. And when escaping from Greel through the sewers, Leela wears only Victorian underwear. Louise Jameson recalls: "I was assured that it would be all right to get it wet. However, on the take, my lovely Victorian underwear went completely transparent. They couldn't do a retake, so it was cut down a bit — but that's all. It didn't help that throughout the story I was suffering from glandular fever."

As with almost all major BBC period dramas, only the principle cast wore clothes specially tailored for them. The outfits for the supporting cast either came internally from the BBC's extensive Wardrobe Department, or were hired from Bermann and Nathans. It was from the

John Bloomfield

Wardrobe Department that regular **Who** music composer Dudley Simpson was costumed for his one cameo appearance in the programme. He played the Conductor of the Palace Theatre Orchestra during the stage performance (although the music was played from tape, and not by the extras who appeared as the musicians).

Sound and music

The grams and composed music rquirements for TALONS were as varied as they were extensive. On the one hand, a conventional three-piece orchestra was needed for the Palace Theatre scenes. The music for these was, like all the music, conducted by Dudley Simpson. The performances were recorded at the BBC's Maida Vale studios rather than 'live' at TV Centre for acoustic reasons.

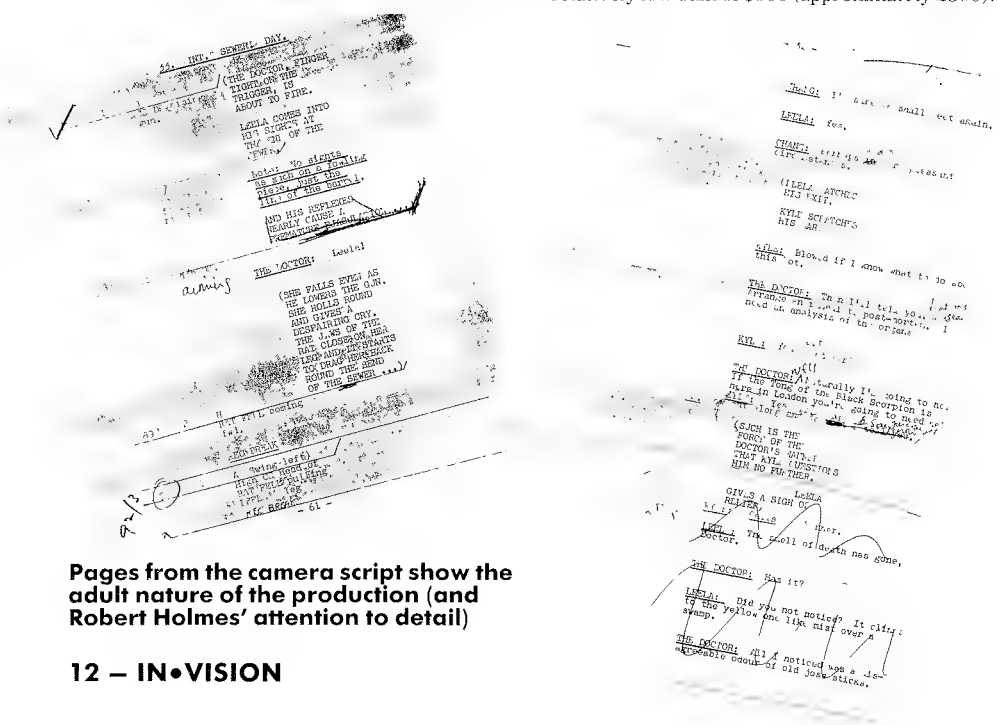
By contrast, the oriental nature of the serial inspired Simpson to use a number of Eastern percussion instruments for the Tong-related scenes. The incidental music was played by an orchestra of six musicians, and included such instruments as Chinese cymbals and a marimba gong. As with THE DEADLY ASSASSIN (serial 4P, see **IN•VISION** issue 18), the organ music was played by Leslie Pearson.

The Grams department too had its work cut out on this story. To achieve as authentic a period a feel as possible, the atmosphere tracks had to include noises varying from the exaggerated sound of lapping water (for the recovery of Buller's corpse), through river barges' hooters and street vendors, to horses' hooves clopping on cobbled streets to augment the carriage sounds recorded on location.

Script changes

Holmes completed his scripts in time to meet all the deadlines. Despite the pressures of time, they were rich in dialogue and plotting. Typical Holmes-touches included "Eureka" being translated by the Doctor as "Greek for 'This bath is too hot'"; and with due deference to Lady Bracknell, Leela's origins were explained as "found floating down the Amazon in a hat box." "A hat box?!"

However, not all the jokes made it to the screen. For example, as the Doctor ponders Li H'Sen's cryptic gesture to his footwear as a clue to Greel's whereabouts, Leela asks in all innocence if it implies that the villain has gone to



Pages from the camera script show the adult nature of the production (and Robert Holmes' attention to detail)

Boot Hill.

In many respects Holmes produced a script which was too adult-rated to make it to transmission without some cuts and changes. One deletion was a line where Greel describes the victims he needs for his Distillation Cabinet as "maidens at the point of puberty. They are the ideal material."

Similarly, in recognition of the show's younger audience, a scene was cut where the Doctor and Leela are stalking through a smoke-filled room in the House of the Dragon. The Doctor explains to Leela the effects fo *Papaver Somniferum* while opium adicts lie sleeping around them.

Holmes's love of gore was also curbed. One significant piece of narrative removed was the the visualisation of how Li H'Sen controlled Mr Sin. The filmed sequence of the mannequin jumping out to attack Buller the cabbie was to have been preceded by a scene of Chang in his dressing room. Chang sits crossed-legged on the floor, his face lit by the glow from an incense burner, concentrating to direct the actions of the homonculus.

In part three another sequence was omitted. It showed Chang standing rigid by the unconscious body of Litefoot as he mentally guides Mr Sin towards Leela. Only as he hears the Doctor's footsteps does he break his control to go outside with a gun (lifted from Litefoot's body) turning Mr Sin over to self-control. This disorientates the dummy for long enough for Leela to escape through the window.

But one of the greatest modifications was in part five, when Greel discovers that Lee has forgotten to bring the Trionic Lattice from the theatre. In the original script Greel goes berserk, kicking Lee to the floor, and repeatedly shooting his twitching body with a 'Magnum Blaster' while cursing the coolie's incompetence. The poison pill substitute was considered less dramatic, but more tasteful.

On the whole, the rewrites to the first four parts were minor and mainly for cosmetic reasons. Parts five and six presented more of a problem, necessitating both a late insert scene and a complete rethink of the climax to episode five.

Holmes must have been aware of David Maloney's fondness for freeze-frame endings, and had written part five to end with Greel threatening to kill Leela unless the Doctor hands over ther Lattice. When the Doctor refuses, Greel turns to the captive Leela, points, and orders Sin to "Kill her!" The final shot, freeze-framed, was to be on Sin's knife as he steps forward and stabs it upward toward Leela.

But by this time the outcry surrounding THE DEADLY ASSASSIN had broken (see *Not waiving* in **IN•VISION** issue 18). Prudently avoiding another brush with BBC management and the Corporation's chairman, the production team shifted the ending back a little to the unmasking of Greel.

This change and the slight under-running of the final episodes also meant that a padding scene had to be inserted. This was where Jago and Litefoot escape from their cell in a dumbwaiter lift, and are then recaptured and thrown back into the prison (the dumbwaiter doors having been padlocked shut).

Mr. Sin

The ventriloquist dummy Mr. Sin, who turns out to be the Peking Homonculus, was played by Deep Roy. David Maloney: "I found a small Asian actor called Deep Roy to play the puppet. Of course, we had a dummy too. Sometimes we never knew which was which — and that could be quite sinister."

A point was made of never having Sin speak except when Chang was holding him — so the audience could never be sure whether it was indeed the homonculus or Chang's ventriloquism. In later episodes, Sin laughs and grunts but never speaks.

Location filming

While Robert Holmes was finishing the scripts, David Maloney was taking what had been written so far to plan his exteriors. Christmas 1976 was approaching and the festive wind-down would create a gap mid-way through the time allotted for location filming.

The time constraints caused by the Christmas break meant that Tom Baker and Louise Jameson went straight from recording their scenes for THE ROBOTS OF DEATH (serial 4R, see last issue) to costume-fitting for TALONS. The last studio session for ROBOTS was on December 7th, 1976; the location shoot for TALONS started on December 13th.

The primary location was Wapping in East London, close to the Thames. Although shortly to undergo massive urban redevelopment, sufficient areas of the old brick-built area remained for the unit to find streets, wharfs and alleyways that could be redressed into Victorian style.

The street for the hansom cab presented the biggest problems. All the modern road markings and fixtures had to be removed, obscured, or in some way disguised — including a Porsche motor car, parked against advice the night before the filming. It made for some inventive solutions, such as covering the white lines in the middle of the road with piles of artificial horse dung.

Being December, the early nightfalls were, for once, helpful. Much of the filmed work was set at night, and the crew was able to rehearse and plan during the day then shoot from five o'clock till ten. This enabled Maloney to reduce costs on what could have been a prohibitively expensive night-time shoot.

The effects used on film were relatively minor — like the reaction of the Trionic Lattice to the Time Cabinet. The prop was lit from inside, glowing as Greel's carriage approaches Litefoot's house, and then flashing as they stand outside.

The most complex scene to film was the fight between the Doctor, Leela and the Tong coolies. This was choreographed by stunt arranger Stuart Fell. The end result was both dramatic and realistic — so much so that when the story was released on BBC video in 1988 parts of the fight were reframed (using QUANTEL) or edited to remove and substitute sections where weapons were too obviously being used.

The daytime scenes were shot during the second week of filming. These included the sequence with the Doctor and Litefoot boating down the Thames and the kidnapping of the ▷

prostitute Theresa by Li H'Sen Chang.

The effect of Chang's eyes blazing with hypnotic light was a video insert, because of the noticeable juddering when a video optical effect is superimposed on film (see **IN•VISION** issue one). The close-up of John Bennett to which the electronic effect was added was recorded in the studio against a black background.

Stunt jump

The film unit then moved back to West London to shoot the exterior scenes at Litefoot's house. Two days were spent there, including one night shoot. Once again, Stuart Fell took a large portion of the shoot — this time to rehearse and perform a stunt dive through a ground floor window.

For the jump, the glass window pane was replaced with toffee glass, behind which was positioned a small trampoline. Stuart Fell was padded and dressed in Leela's costume, then took a running leap on to the trampoline and through the window. His landing was out of sight on a pile of matresses and cardboard boxes.

The jump was from a ground floor window, but the camera was kept as low as possible to try to make the stunt seem even more spectacular — particularly with the BBC stock glass-smashing sound effect dubbed over it.

In the studio

Production continued after the Christmas/New Year break, but on a very tight schedule. Rehearsals started on January 3rd ready for studio recording to begin on January 8th.

Over that weekend most of the small-set scenes were done. These included the police station, backstage at the Palace Theatre, the dressing rooms and cellar.

Litefoot's hallway — note the back of the living room wall

One of the only effects needed in the first block was the Doctor and Jago's encounter with the ghost in the cellar. This was little more than the traditional painted sheet draped over an extra's head and ChromaKeyed into the final picture. (The money spider they find was a static prop.)

It was a requirement for this recording block that the sets should not require much in the way of maintenance or redressing by the scenic designer. Designer Roger Murray-Leach was already with his construction crew at the next location site, readying it for shooting to start there on the Monday (December 10th).

Outside Broadcast

Because the remainder of the location work would be indoors, Maloney decided to minimise his film costs by shooting all these interiors on videotape using an Outside Broadcast Unit (an LMCR). This makes TALONS the first **Doctor Who** story to be location-shot using a mixture of film and video. The only problem with this approach was booking an OB unit — which is why the OB location work had to be shot back-to-back with the first studio session.

At the theatre

The main venue for the mobile studio was the Royal Theatre in Northampton, which impressed Hinchcliffe: "All that behind-the-scenes stuff lokked really classy, because it was obviously *not* a studio". Three days were spent there, partly

The Royal Theatre, Northampton

because of the amount of material needed but also because the location could only be used during the day.

David Maloney recalled: "We used the Northampton rep theatre because it's still got the original Victorian flying area above the stage and we had a big chase there."

It was a special day for the Northampton Repertory Company. Apart from the presence of the BBC OB unit, January 1977 also marked the fiftieth anniversary of their formation. A celebratory banquet was held on January 10th to which members of the production unit were invited, and Tom Baker was the guest speaker.

Despite having the whole theatre at his disposal, David Maloney chose only to use the stage, the stalls and some of the flies as locations. Although open since 1884, the Royal Theatre had undergone several renovations and modernisations which made much of it unusable without extensive (and costly) camouflaging of anachronisms.

Once again, stunt arranger Stuart Fell took centre stage for the *Phantom of the Opera* chase through the flies .

Doubling for both the Doctor and Greel, Fell did all of the risky chase shots himself. These included climbing catwalk ladders and a direct pinch from the Laroux novel the figure (in this case the Doctor) sliding to the ground down a ripped backcloth.

In hospital

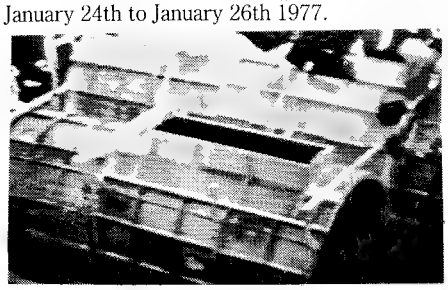
On the last day the OB unit moved over to nearby St. Crispin's hospital. The marble tiling and immediate availability of medical equipment made it cheaper to use as Litefoot's mortuary than building a set at TV Centre.

As a further saving on sets, another part of the hospital was modified into the Palace Theatre dressing room where Li H'Sen leaves the hypnotised Theresa.

All location work was completed by January 13th which gave cast and production team a short break before rehearsals started again for the second studio block.

Second studio

The second studio recording block ran from January 24th to January 26th 1977.



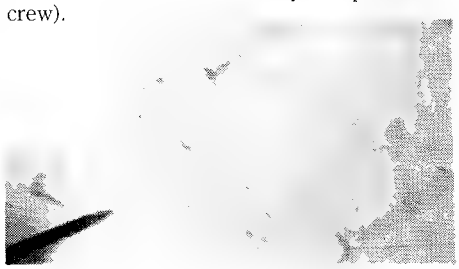
The enclosed sewer sets

The main sets for this session were the sewers, Magnus Greel's lair, and Litefoot's house. To complicate matters, while the production team was recording **Doctor Who**, another crew was filming them to use as insert material for the forthcoming documentary **Whose Doctor Who** to be shown on April 3rd in the BBC2 series, **The Lively Arts** (see next issue).

As the documentary would later show, the sewer sets were required to be very robust. The were made in sections so they could be reconfigured to give the illusion of more tunnels than there really were. They were also made to be sturdy enough to support the actors, and were fitted with channels into which gallons of dirty water could safely be poured. For establishing shots, such as when the Doctor and Leela first go into the sewers towards the end of part one, live rats (normal size) ran loose in the set.

The rat

Once again Stuart Fell was an important player. This time he was the giant sewer rat (or *Ratman Fell*, as he was christened by the production crew).



Design showing the actor's position

The rat was a joint venture between costume and visual effects. An actor rat was felt to be needed in preference to either a model or ChromaKey shot of a live rat. This was because the rat had to act and move on cue. However, a real rat in a model sewer was used for one establishing shot towards the end of part one.

The costume was complicated, with a set of flexible, sprung jaws that could be operated from a grip mechanism by Stuart Fell. Fell also had to learn to dash along at speed in a heavily padded outfit with a very restricted line of sight.

John Bloomfield and his rat

Robert Holmes attributed any shortfalls in the production of TALONS to the rat. It was compared unfavourably with the all-miniature rat seen in the GNAWS episode of **The New Avengers**, which by coincidence was broadcast on ITV midway through the run of TALONS.

Philip Hinchliffe: "When we decided we were going to tackle a rat, we thought we would solve it by a number of ways. One way would be to actually have real rats in a model sewer, which we used certain shots of. But we wanted the rat to perform specific actions — it actually has to get hold of somebody's leg, it has to (as it were) act on cue.

"Now the only way to solve that, really, is to put somebody inside a costume and get them to perform. So it fell to John Bloomfield to design a costume.

"One of the perennial problems of a monster, whether they are a speaking monster or whether they are an articulated monster, is to get believability in the way they actually move, particularly the jaw movement. In this case, I think John came up with a very simple but

effective solution of totally detaching the lower jaw of the rat, and attaching it to a sort of rugby scrum cap which the actor wore inside the mouth of the rat. So you got a great degree of movement."

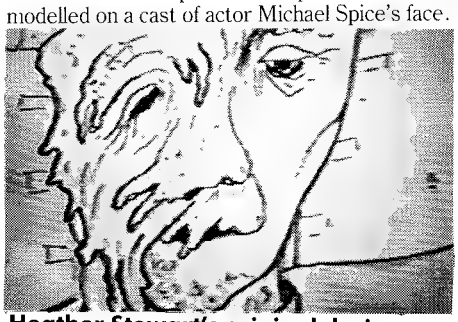
Distillation unit

The distillation cabinet was first used in this recording block. Originally Robert Holmes had envisaged some kind of 'Universal Studios' *Frankenstein* machine, with two metal globes that descended from the top of the device until they were parallel with the victim's head. As the machine was activated, talons of lightning would zap between the globes and the victim, "shredding the flesh" and carbonising her to a lifeless, burnt-out husk.

In the event, ChramaKeyed colour bars were easier and cheaper. But in keeping with the script's requirements for the victim's skin to become "like old leaves", a recording break was scheduled after the machine's use. During this the victim's face was dabbed with charcoal-coloured make-up.

Make-up

The major make-up requirement was the Zygma-distorted face of Magnus Greel. Designer Heather Stewart produced a prosthetic mask modelled on a cast of actor Michael Spice's face.



Heather Stewart's original design

Philip Hinchliffe: "Heather Stewart had a particular problem with the character of Greel. There is a sequence which calls for Leela to rip his mask off, and we see the distorted face beneath it.

The finished prosthetic

"I was very concerned about this, because obviously for it to have an impact it had to be quite gruesome. On the other hand, we can't leave it on the screen for very long — so it is just a flash on the screen. But of course, Heather has spent days and weeks planning this one effect, for what is on the screen for one second."

Dragon

The final recording block ran from February 8th to 10th. During this all the episode five and six footage in and around The House of the Dragon was recorded.

The dragon prop itself was huge, carved out of block polystyrene. It was so large that it could only be moved in and out of the studio in sections, and it had to be drastically cut-down to fit into the **Doctor Who** exhibition at Longleat House in the summer of 1977.

Being polystyrene, the dragon could not support any appreciable weight. So all the shots of Mr. Sin inside the head were cutaways or point of view shots from a crane-mounted camera.

A freelance sculptor worked through the night to produce the polystyrene dragon

The laser gun sights seen over the point of view shots were a vignette fitted over the camera lens, with a pulsing green video image added outside the frame of the picture. The laser beams from the dragon's eyes were achieved by a simple caption-slide overlay (as was Greel's laser pistol earlier).

The devastation wrought by the dragon's laser was more difficult to achieve. Michaeljohn Harris, the Visual Effects Designer, explains: "One of the sequences in it involved a great big ornate Chinese table, and it was supposed to be progressively shot to pieces by bolts from the Chinese idol.

The Eye of the Dragon

"It worked perfectly in our workshop, everything was fine. We moved it into the studio with no problems. I had already wired it up the night before, got everything ready.

"When we actually came to fire it, I found that the painter had put a coat of varnish over everything and it was firmly stuck together. Nothing worked. It wouldn't come apart in any of the joints we had made."

Philip Hinchcliffe, watching the delays to the final recording block of his producership, was not amused either. He pays tribute to Maloney's skills as a director for getting the show finished on time and within the budget: "We went into overtime rather radically, but David was a wizard at grabbing what he could and sticking it together. Right up to the very last second, he would be *shouting* 'Get that! Get that!' to the cameras. He grabbed something out of nothing — he got you a programme out of failure."

Robert Holmes too was pleased with the end result:"I think David Maloney was a wonderful director — he got it all so right."

Reception

Even up to the last minute, changes were made. The BBC Drama Early Warning Synopsis still bears the original title of the script — THE TALONS OF GREEL — typewritten on it. This has been changed by hand, suggesting that the decision to alter the title (presumably as Greel's real name is not mentioned until the last episode) was taken late in the day.

Nevertheless, despite the tight schedules and production headaches, when THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG was broadcast it was received by fans and public as an example of **Doctor Who** at its best.

The fourteenth season of the programme earned nomination in the 1977 BAFTA awards — possibly because of its high production standards, or perhaps because of the series' high profile in a period of sustained press criticism. (It was beaten by **Blue Peter**.) The contents of the series also earned it another shift further back in the transmission times.

Overseas, Australia initially refused to show TALONS, while in Canada TV Ontario were reprimanded for showing it by leaders of the Chinese community who felt the content to be derogatory to them. (Hinchliffe's later admission to **IN•VISION**: "Well it's true, it was.")

Robert Holmes considered THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG to be the favourite of his own **Doctor Who** stories. "I wasn't aware TALONS had received any critical or negative review," he said. "It was very popular in the UK and the *Doctor Who Appreciation Society* members voted it the best story of that season. I thought it worked pretty well apart from the giant rat which, with its little pink ears, looked far too cuddly.

"The rat was in fact a superbly-constructed model and looked giant in the studio. The reason it failed on camera was — we realised too late — that, as a sewer rat, it should have been all gunky and scaley. The story, of course, was a remake of *The Phantom of the Opera*, plus a touch of the *Fu-Manchu*s and a few bits of my own." (Interestly, Hinchcliffe never thought of the story as being influenced by the *Phantom*.)

Trivia

The gun used by the Doctor to kill the giant rat was a genuine Victorian firing piece, supplied by Baptys.

The Doctor's cane contains a phial of drink held in the silver top — presumably brandy as he gives it to Jago after his shocking encounter with Greel.

The date in which the story is set is never given, but Litefoot says the Time Cabinet was given to his mother before they left China in 1873. He describes that as "quite some years now."

Litefoot and Jago, often cited by fans as a 'double-act' do not meet until well into the penultimate episode.

The Doctor has a model BatMobile in his pocket in part six.

The complete TARDIS dematerialisation sound is heard under the final scene of Jago and Litefoot being impressed with the TARDIS leaving.

Robert Holmes' anecdote of location filming — the first and only time he visited a **Who** location was of "a giggle of office girls, craning out of an upper window" asking for Tom Baker and John Bennett's autographs. John Bennett was unamused, having spent a great deal of time and trouble in make up to become Li H'Sen Chang.

The Sunday Times in December 1977 acknowledged one line from the script as one of its *Quotes of the Year*. The line was attributed to "A character in 'Doctor Who' and was Litefoot's "I may have had a bang on the head, but this is a dashed queer story." □

US book cover — note *Frankenstein*-type machine and Sandeman Port man

Context

CAST

DR WHO ..... Tom Baker
LEELA ..... Louise Jameson
LI H'SEN CHANG ..... John Bennett (1-5)
MR SIN ..... Deep Roy
LEE ..... Tony Then (1,4-5)
HENRY GORON JAGO ..... Christopher Benjamin
JOSEPH BULLER ..... Alan Butler (1)
CASEY ..... Chris Gannon (1-4)
COOLIE ..... John Wu(1)
PC QUICK ..... Conrad Asquith (1-2)
SERGEANT KYLE ..... David McKall (1-2)
GHOUL ..... Patsy Smart (1)
PROFESSOR GEORGE LITEFOOT ..... Trevor Baxter
WENG-CHIANG (MAGNUS GREEL) ..... Michael Spice (2-6)
TERESA ..... Judith Lloyd (3)
CLEANER ..... Vaune Craig-Raymond (3)
LOTTIE RANDALL (SINGER) ..... Penny Lister (4)
HO ..... Vincent Wong (5-6)

Small & non-speaking

PALACE THEATRE CONDUCTOR OF MUSIC
Dudley Simpson (1-4)
GIANT RAT ..... Stuart Fell (1-4)
STUNTMEN
Alan Chuntz (1), Max Faulkner (1-2,4), Stuart Fell (4,6)
COOLIES
Vincent Wong (1), Dennis Chinn (1,5-6), Fred Leown (1,5-6), Jimmy Ang (5-6), Sabu Kimura (5-6), Arnold Lee (5-6)
EXTRAS (MAINLY THEATRE AUDIENCE) (1)
Ronald Musgrove, Mary Maxted, Charles Adey Gray, John Cannon, James Haswell, Lisa Bergmayer, Kevin Sullivan, Richard Sheekey, Jean Channon, Marie Anthony, David J. Grahame, Bill Hughes, Hentley Young, Bernard Price, James Lloyd, Tony Randle, Chris Carrington, Bob Williams
YOUNG GIRLS (5) ..... Debbie Cumming, Helen Simnet

CREW

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT ..... Ros Anderson
ASSISTANT FLOOR MANAGER ..... Linda Graeme
DIRECTOR'S ASSISTANT ..... Rosemary Parsons
FLOOR ASSISTANTS ..... Sue Box (?)
STUDIO LIGHTING ..... Mike Jefferies
STUDIO SOUND ..... Clive Gifford
OB LIGHTING ..... John Mason
OB SOUND ..... Vic Goodrich
FILM CAMERAMAN ..... Fred Hamilton
FILM SOUND ..... John Gatland
FILM EDITOR ..... David Lee
FIGHT ARRANGER ..... Stuart Fell (1-2,5-6)
MAGIC ADVISORS ..... Larry Barnes (1,4), Ali Bongo (1,4)
COSTUME DESIGNER ..... John Bloomfield
COSTUME ASSISTANT ..... Alun Hughes
MAKE-UP ARTIST ..... Heather Stewart
MAKE-UP ASSISTANTS
Christine Baker, Jennifer Hughes, Martha Livesley
VISUAL EFFECTS DESIGNER ..... Michaeljohn Harris
VISUAL EFFECTS ASSISTANT ..... Andrew Lazell
DESIGNER ..... Roger Murray-Leach
DESIGN ASSISTANT ..... Gerry Scott
INCIDENTAL MUSIC ..... Dudley Simpson
SPECIAL SOUND ..... Dick Mills
PRODUCTION UNIT MANAGER
Christopher D'Oyly-John
STORY ..... Robert Banks Stewart
SCRIPT EDITOR ..... Robert Holmes
PRODUCER ..... Philip Hinchcliffe
DIRECTOR ..... David Maloney

TRANSMISSION

Part 1: 26th February 1977, 18.32.12 (24'44")
Part 2: 5th March 1977, 18.37.18 (24'26")
Part 3: 12th March 1977, 18.31.36 (21'56")
Part 4: 19th March 1977, 18.31.30 (24'30")
Part 5: 26th March 1977, 18.30.44 (24'49")
Part 6: 2nd April 1977, 18.30.51 (23'26")

FILMING

BBC week 50/51
London

OB RECORDING

8-13 January 1977
Northampton Repertory Theatre

RECORDING

25th January 1977
8th, 9th, 10th February 1977

FILM

Part 1: 217' (16mm sound)
Part 2: 102' (16mm sound)
Part 3: 240' (16mm sound)
Part 4: 39' (16mm sound)
Part 5: 16' (16mm sound)
Part 6: None

MUSIC

Part 1:
1'40" *Music of the Streets* Cylinder Piano Music, Roy Mickleburgh (Saydisc SDL 121)
4'02" *Theatre Orchestra Music*, Dudley Simpson (3 musicians conducted by Dudley Simpson)
4'13" Incidental music, Dudley Simpson (6 musicians conducted by Dudley Simpson)
Part 2:
12' *Music of the Streets* Cylinder Pian Music, Roy Mickleburgh (Saydisc SDL 121) 6'15" Incidental music, Dudley Simpson (6 musicians conducted by Dudley Simpson)
4'06" Incidental music, Dudley Simpson (Leslie Pearson on organ)
Part 3:
22" *Colonel Bogey*, Kenneth Alford, Boosey & Hawkes (whistled by Tom Baker)
7'05" Incidental music, Dudley Simpson (6 musicians conducted by Dudley Simpson) 1'02" Incidental music, Dudley Simpson (Leslie Pearson on organ)
Part 4:
3'53" *Theatre Orchestra Music*, Dudley Simpson (3 musicians conducted by Dudley Simpson)
1'13" *Daisy Bell*, Harry Dacre arranged by Dudley Simpson, Francis Day & Hunter (sung by Penny Lister, 3 musicians conducted by Dudley Simpson)
5'42" Incidental music, Dudley Simpson (6 musicians conducted by Dudley Simpson)
Part 5:
Details not available
Part 6:
50' *Music of the Streets* Cylinder Piano Music, Roy Mickleburgh (Saydisc SDL 121)
7'41" Incidental music, Dudley Simpson (6 musicians conducted by Dudley Simpson)

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221B
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Ideal Holmes

ANDREW LANE argues that the influence of Sherlock on Robert was merely an elementary Holmesian allusion

"It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, istead of theories to suit facts."

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the Doctor's deductions"

"The Doctor made no deductions"

"That was the curious incident"

IT has become a cliche: THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG is a Sherlock Holmes pastiche. So much so that nobody says it any more. It is taken as read. The fog, the hansom cabs, the alleys and byeways of London, the bizarre villain — of course it's Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes, with the Doctor playing the great detective to the hilt. With Gordon Henry Jago and George Litefoot sharing the honours as Watson. The connections are so obvious that it is a shame it's not true.

Like much of the programme recently, THE TALONS OF WENG-CHIANG (serial 4S) is a triumph of style over content. It picks up not on the truth of Sherlock Holmes, but on what people think the truth is. In fact, the vast majority of Holmes' cases do not take place in London, do not involve fog and hansom cabs, and revolve around villains smaller, rather than larger, than life.

TALONS uses the window-dressing. The Doctor's costume of deerstalker and cloak is suitably Holmesian, except that Holmes never wore a deerstalker — that was an invention of one of the original artists, based on the stage performance of actor William Gillette as Holmes. Professor Litefoot's housekeeper is named Mrs Hudson, as is Holmes' housekeeper, though for no very good reason.

Jago's belief in the Doctor's ascendancy over Scotland Yard rivals Watson's adulation of Holmes' talents: "It's my opinion he solves half of their cases and then lets them take the credit for it," Jago enthuses to token Irishman Casey at one stage. Later he tells Litefoot: "Fleck of mud here, speck of paint there — clues that speak volumes to a trained investigator like him". But Jago's enthusiasm is rather misplaced: what does the Doctor actually do to justify this assumed persona?

SHERLOCK Holmes' reputation rests upon his powers of observation, memory and deduction. In the case of *The Red Headed League*, for example, Holmes *observes* that Jabez Wilson has an unusual fish tattoo, *remembers* that the delicate pink of the scales is peculiar to China, and *deduces* that Wilson has been to the Orient. Similarly, in *The Disappearance of Lady Francis Carfax*, Holmes *observes* that Watson has splashes of mud on his left shoulder and sleeve, and that his boots are fastened in an ornate bow, *remembers* that Watson invariably ties his boots with a plain bow, and so *deduces* that Watson has taken a hansom cab with a companion to the Turkish baths. "Absurd, is it not?" as Holmes says.

In comparison, the Doctor puts up a bad showing. Fair enough, his memory is as good — he immediately recognises sorpion venom, the Tong of the Black Scorpion, the rat hairs on the murdered cab driver and the effects of opium. But his ratiocinations are few and far between.

He deduces that one of the police constables has had a drink with Mrs Gussett, based on the lingering smell of gin on his breath; that Litefoot's attacker was a midget, because he sneaked into the house in a laundry basket; that Litefoot and Jago have been gone from the house for some time, since the fire has had time to die and go cold; and that Weng-Chiang's base is probably in Boot Court — and that only after the dying Li H'Sen Chang grabs the Doctor's boot when asked where the place is, not the most obscure of clues.

In fact, none of these deductions were terribly difficult to make — not a patch, in fact, on the conclusions that Holmes made concerning the dreadful business of the Abernetty family based on the depth to which the parsley had sunk in the butter on a hot day. The Doctor stumbles his way through the story in a sort of divine daze — only foiling Greel's plans in the nick of time through accident and blind luck.

THIS is not reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes at all. In fact, it puts one more in mind of Sir Denis Nayland Smith, arch-enemy of the devil incarnate, that embodiment of the Yellow Peril, Doctor Fu-Manchu. The connections here are more obvious: the fog, the alleys, the crowds of orientals skulking through the streets spoiling for a fight, the base on the river, the villain who expands his lifespan through strange scientific means, the hero and his sidekick who blunder into trouble but escape more through luck than by judgement, the melodrama, the plot device that could affect the world. It's almost too good to be true.

The period is a little early — the first Fu-Manchu novel was published in 1913, by which time Holmes was happily keeping bees on the Sussex Downs.

There is undoubtedly a far greater correlation between TALONS and the fiteen books in the Fu-Manchu series than between WENG-CHIANG and Sherlock Holmes. But the legend that has grown up connecting the two will never die — just like Holmes will never die, no matter how many times he visits Reichenbach. And all the articles which have been written concerning this supposed connection? In the words of Holmes himself (Sherlock not Robert), "What a chorus of groans, cries and bleatings!" □

The Doctor tries to impersonate Sherlock Holmes